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ABSTRACT

Communication scholars have addressed a number of theoretical issues concerning the basis of knowledge and reality. They have not, however, accompanied their theories with parallel empirical studies. Given the important implications such work might have for the interpretation and generalizability of observer accounts, two studies were conducted during a weekend workshop on qualitative research methods. The first study examined similarities and differences in four groups' accounts of an event to which all were uniformly exposed. Comparisons were made between group descriptions to determine the degree to which groups of individual accounts agree. The second study involved nine intensive interviews with the members of one of the four groups, who were asked to provide descriptions of an event experienced by all. Data were compared between individual group members. Results of the studies indicated in general that the group accounts were consistent within each group, but that individual accounts varied in both focus and specificity. (FL)

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VALIDITY TESTING:
A SYSTEMATIC EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL CONSENSUS AND
INTERSUBJECTIVITY IN QUALITATIVE OBSERVATION

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Abstract

In recent years, communication scholars have addressed a number of theoretical issues concerning the basis of knowledge and reality (e.g., Brockriede, 1982, 1983; Brummett, 1976, 1981; Farrell, 1976, 1978; Croasmun & Cherwitz, 1982; Cherwitz & Hikins, 1983; Railsback, 1983). Parallel empirical studies in this area, however, have not been forthcoming. Given the important implications that such work would have for the interpretation and generalizability of observer accounts of qualitative data, two empirical studies were conducted. The first study reports on similarities and differences in four groups' accounts of an event to which all four were uniformly exposed. Comparisons were made between group descriptions to determine the degree to which groups of individual accounts agree. The second study reports on a set of nine intensive interviews conducted with the members of one of the four groups. Subjects were again asked to provide descriptions of an event experienced by all and data were compared between individual group members. Generally, results indicated that the group accounts (study one) were consistent within each group, but that individual accounts (study two) varied from one another in both focus and specificity. Implications for validity and the use of multiple, as compared to singular observers in qualitative research are discussed.

Validity Testing:

A Systematic Examination of Social Consensus and Intersubjectivity in Qualitative Observation

Weick (1985) discusses five ways in which the validity of observational research can be evaluated. These include: "(1) see if expected things happen, (2) search for negative or unexpected instances, (3) ask people about the interpretations...(4) act accordingly to the interpretation to see how people respond...and (5) stir things up to see if people respond in expected ways" (p. 604). Others have similarly noted one or more of these possible validity checks including Campbell (1975), who encourages methodological triangulation; Dawson (1979), who advises qualitative researchers to check their perceptions with participants, and LeCompte and Goetz (1982), who note the benefits of multiple researchers as a means of controlling the quality of data collected.

In keeping with such standards, qualitative researchers face the challenge of maintaining a balance between two diametrically opposed demands: establishing the validity of their data through consensus and giving justice to the unique perspective or knowledge of each participant. The relative "newness" of standards used to evaluate the validity of qualitative methods, coupled with the lack of a generally accepted definition of "knowledge" both contribute to the challenging nature of this task.

Indeed, the rhetorical communication literature reveals at least two contrasting views on the definition of "knowledge" or

"reality." One, characterized by the work of Farrell (1976; 1978) and Brummett (1976; 1981), suggests that knowledge is created through social consensus. Farrell (1976), for example, differentiates between "social knowledge" and "technical knowledge" by noting that the latter concerns specialized methods of research whereas the former involves the interests of individuals within a social system. Both types of knowledge, according to Farrell (1978), are "grounded in consensus" (p. 330). Brummett (1976) similarly notes that "the study of what and how people know is nothing more or less than the study of the nature of reality" (p. 28) and that reality involves the participation of individuals in a creative process. Although he articulates a critique of Farrell's (1976) account of rhetorical knowledge, Carleton (1978) agrees with both Farrell and Brummett in their characterization of "knowledge as socially grounded" (p. 313).

A contrasting view of knowledge is reflected in the work of Croasmun and Cherwitz (1982) and Cherwitz and Hikins (1983), who suggest that knowledge is not created through consensus, but rather that it is acquired over time through empirical observation. Croasmun and Cherwitz note that "consensus is an attribute of opinion, rather than a defining characteristic of reality or knowledge" (p. 9). They depict social agreement, in other words, not as a creator of knowledge in and of itself, but as a step in the process of knowledge acquisition. Cherwitz and Hikins elaborate on this line of thought by deliniating a theory of "rhetorical perspectivism," which seeks to create a link

between intersubjective or consensual reality and objective, empirical reality by defining the former as a perspective of the latter.

A third group of scholars has attempted to reconcile these two views of knowledge by suggesting alternate models which incorporate elements of both. Brockriede's (1982, 1983) writings on human understanding, for instance, emphasize perspectivism, and use Gestalt psychologists' metaphor of figure and ground to illustrate the differential emphases that human beings place on any given dimension or relationship. He further discusses the breadth of human understanding, noting that empirical, personal, or linguistic dimensions can serve as the figure, or primary object of emphasis, on either a microscopic or a macroscopic level. Railsback (1983) proposes a structural-material model of truth and objective reality which takes the position that "objective reality exists, objective reality constrains rhetoric, but objective reality does not entail objective truth" (p. 353). She explains this argument by noting that three different types of maps may all present a "true" representation, but each is relevant to a distinctive group of people and each has the potential to be an incorrect representation of reality. Warnick (1983) also suggests an alternative by characterizing knowledge as a system based on observation, experience, authority, and consensus. She notes that "A knowledge system is not a determinate entity: it is a socially coordinated, linguistically based network of propositions" (p. 30).

Despite the number of theoretical articles that have been

written on the basis of knowledge, speech communication scholars have not reported any empirical studies examining possible similarities or differences in persons' observations of, or perspectives on a single event. Empirical evidence demonstrating such differences in the collection and interpretation of observational data would not only have implications for the manner in which we characterize persons' descriptions of "reality," whether that be a socially constructed reality or an objective reality, but also has implications for observational research methods, as any event or stimuli may be interpreted differently by any given individual. As noted by Bowers and Bradac (1982), both a "particularized" and a more "generalized" view of any one phenomena constitute useful information, however, each carries differential levels of generalizability which must be considered in discussing research results.

In order to address such theoretical and methodological issues, two studies have been conducted examining a number of personal interpretations of a single event. The first reports on differences as well as similarities in four groups' accounts of a discussion assignment given uniformly to each. Group members' descriptions of what took place during the exercise were obtained through a set of personal field notes, hand-written by each member directly following the discussion. Comparisons were made between the group descriptions to determine the degree to which groups of individual accounts agree with one another. The second reports on a set of nine intensive interviews conducted with the members of one of the four discussion groups. Questions

were designed to elicit accounts similar to those provided in the field notes. Subjects were asked, in other words, to provide descriptions of an event to which all were uniformly exposed. Data were then compared between individual group members. A description of the degree of agreement between the accounts is provided and implications for the use of multiple, as compared to singular observers are discussed.

Study One

Procedure

The context. The stimulus event consisted of two exercises conducted during a weekend workshop on qualitative research methods designed to facilitate participants' observation and interviewing skills (Browning, 1986). The first exercise took place on the first evening of the workshop. Following a presentation of issues related to observation, individuals were given 5-10 minutes to prepare a list of six values that affected their observations of others and were then instructed to share these values in a 30-45 minute leaderless group discussion. Lastly, participants were given the remainder of the evening (approximately one to two hours) to write field notes on their observations of the group discussion. The second exercise began the next morning and required participants to develop a "mini-theory" that provided an explanation of what occurred during the previous night's discussion as well as a schedule of interview questions that could be used to verify their theory. This set of questions was used later in the morning, when participants conducted interviews in the reassembled group.

The data. The data for this first study consisted of the field notes hand-written by workshop participants on the first evening of the workshop. Thirty sets of field notes from four different groups were examined.

Analysis

The field notes from participants in each group were first read and highlighted. Using analytic induction (Goetz & LeCompte, 1981), themes were extracted from each set of field notes. These individual themes were then compiled into a number of common themes for each of the four groups. Finally, the common themes that emerged from each group were compared and contrasted across groups to obtain a composite picture of the similarities and differences between each group's account of the first exercise.

Results

A number of similarities emerged in the ways in which each group described their "values" discussion. First, all four of the groups made some reference to how the discussion began. Members from one group, for example, made comments such as "Beth got us going well" and "Beth started off by calling out Chuck's name to start." One member from another group wrote, "No one moved. I asserted myself and asked for introductions," while another member of the same group noted that "The first event was an introduction." Other comments included, "Discussion started at random," "We established an order initially" and "Carolyn started things off and was a catalyst." One individual made note of members' behavior prior to the actual initiation of the

discussion by stating that "Members eyed one another to see who would speak first."

A second similarity between the groups was that each discussed the procedure or the steps that their group took in conducting the discussion. These characterizations were typified by comments such as, "We began to share our lists...we proceeded around the circle...it took about five minutes." A member of another group similarly wrote that "The first event was an introduction. Each group member gave his name and a brief background...Everyone gave their list of the six qualities. The presentation order was random."

Third, all four of the groups included some description of the communication that took place during their respective discussions. An individual in one group, for instance, discussed what he termed as "the sluggishness to respond." A member in another group characterized the discussion as "mainly just narrating with a little discussion." Yet another noted that at one point, the "discussion breaks down into chatter." Other comments focused on words, such as "Many items were repeated but in different words" and "Group is highly verbal...resorts to word play," whereas others still noted general trends such as "conversation tended to increase or stop when he [the workshop coordinator] entered."

Fourth, and finally, each of the groups made a number of moves toward describing individual group members, whether descriptions centered on distinctive characteristics or on general group member roles. The more specific descriptions

included comments such as "Hal is mid 30's, beard, conservative in dress, brown casual shirt with cardigan sweater," "Shari was at times authoritative," or "Nancy is surprisingly 'elitist' in her views." General notations of group members roles often focused on leadership, as participants noted that "Beth took the leadership," "Mike - pseudo group leader," and "Dave and Caroline seemed to vie for leadership position." Other roles noted included: "catalyst," "time-keeper," "observer," and "follower."

Despite these specific similarities, the groups demonstrated a number of differences that affected the general orientation of the accounts given in their field notes. Members in the first group, for instance, repeatedly referred to the cohesiveness of their group. One member noted, that "we had indeed 'stumbled toward identity' and were coming to grips with ourselves as a team." Another stated that "I think the open verbal exchanges and humor of our group shows that we are a relaxed, cohesive group." Such references to humor and joking were not only frequent, but were made at least once by every group member and were often related to the cohesiveness of the group. One individual, for instance, stated that "humor [was] used to cement group one-ness." Another noted more generally that "Humor very much characterized the personality of the group." Humor was further evidenced during a particular event discussed in the field notes, involving the coordinator of the weekend. Apparently, one group member was slightly "nervous" about the coordinator entering and exiting the room during the discussion. In response to this, according to several members, "we began to

brainstorm ways of causing him to react such as staring at him, or becoming suddenly quiet." Following the coordinator's subsequent entrance into the room, field notes indicated that there was "some more humor" and "laughter." In this case, not only does the use of humor illustrate the groups' cohesiveness, but the fact that group members banded together against an outsider, who was reportedly disturbing one of their members also indicates a type of we-ness or togetherness (Scheidel & Crowell, 1979). This "group versus outsider" phenomenon is similarly visible in the groups' references to the "observer," an individual who was not directly associated with the group, but rather observed and took notes on the group as the discussion took place. One individual noted that "Group members...speculated about the effect [the observer's] presence has on group discussion." Another focused on the power of the observer, as opposed to the group, noting that "we easily gave up that control when the observer was speaking." This characterization of the group as one, unified entity, and the observer as another, separate entity provides further support for the idea that this first group was concerned with cohesiveness and that possessing such a concern shaped, at least in part, the group's interaction and their subsequent description of that interaction in their field notes.

The second group, on the other hand, made few, if any references to group cohesiveness. Instead, field notes focused primarily on individual members. For example, in describing the discussion, one member noted that "our group of eight individuals

shared their feelings about the six important aspects." Another stated that "This throw[n] together group of eight random individuals wasn't quite sure what to make of the situation." Descriptions of the communication that occurred during the discussion similarly emphasized individuality as opposed to solidarity, as members made comments such as, "The individuals jumped in and gave their list when they felt like it," "There was not much conversation after I read the examples," and "Actual sharing of info took about five minutes. Little phatic communication. Very task oriented." The lack of cohesiveness is further evidenced by one member's description of the initiation stages of the discussion. He noted that "when the group was formed and the assignment was given, nobody would speak...while discussing similar examples and difficult to understand examples the group opened up to each other and finally felt comfortable with each other. Still though, I don't think the everybody still felt very comfortable." Despite a possible desire to move toward solidarity and a "comfortable" feeling with other group members, this was not apparently accomplished. In fact, field notes also referred to an underlying conflict a number of times by making references to particular topics that emerged during the discussion. One "business major" noted, for instance, that "The biased communications majors felt that the business offices were too stuffy." Another member noted that "Carol mentioned the difference between departments' office setting 'mahogany desk and straight backed chair' in [business] office 'tin desk and couch' in communication department." More general differences were

noted by a member who stated that "Comments were made as to the different terms coming from group members with different backgrounds and training." The heterogeneity in this group, as well as its lack of reported cohesiveness, therefore, seems to have effected the manner in which participants described the first exercise.

Unlike the first two, the third group's field notes reported on the discussion in terms of a developmental process, from tension and formality to cohesiveness and informality. In describing an event at the beginning of the discussion, for example, one member noted that that "Laughter followed and some primary tension was released." Another member stated that initially, the "Group was ill at ease with each other." Such "primary tension" was further demonstrated by a number of comments concerning the polite nature of the group's interaction. One individual stated, for instance, that "The group, as a whole, was considerate of one another and seemed to be attentive." This cautious or tentative attitude on the part of the participants was also evidenced by the effect the entrance of a nonmember, the weekend coordinator, had on their interaction. Spawned by the comments of one individual, who drew the group's attention to this during the discussion, five of the seven group members made notations as to the change in the group's conversation when the coordinator entered the room. Comments such as "conversation tended to increase or stop when he entered," "Conversation tended to pick up or drop off according to the presence of the lecturer," and "Dr. X kept coming in and going out and that made

people nervous and conscious" were typical. This tension diminished, however, by the end of the discussion, when group members reported that "By this time there was more joviality in the group" and "the seriousness of the task dissipated and the group began to socialize and joke." The accounts given by this third group of "what happened" in the exercise, therefore, reflect a progression from tension and discomfort with one another to at least the beginnings of cohesiveness and relatively relaxed interaction between members.

Although some mention was made of being "more comfortable" as the exercise progressed, the fourth group described their discussion primarily in terms of a norm of politeness and what one member termed as "intellectual confidence." The politeness norm was directly addressed by a number of individuals, who made statements such as, "This group...without any instructions on protocol or interaction model, chose a polite/non-argumentative/non-philosophical exchange" and "As a group, behavior was polite toward one another." Similar descriptions characterized the group as "open, non-judgemental, friendly," "accepting of other persons' viewpoint," and "democratic." While group members were to be polite, they also were regarded more highly if they projected an air of "intellectual confidence." One group member stated that "We are all concerned with the intellectual/educational aspect of interactions and...with the innate intelligence of interactants." Another commented on several group members' "self-confidence," while a third said that "slow thinkers turn me off." Perhaps the

most telling evidence of this norm is one member's description of her own interactional pattern. She noted that "I was scared to talk at the beginning. Once I thought that maybe one of my constructs was right, I jumped into the conversation." The desire to appear competent, as well as polite, therefore structured this group's discussion to a great extent.

Together, the results of this study indicate (1) that there were a number of similarities between the groups' field notes, including descriptions of how the discussions were initiated, the procedure used to conduct the discussions, and characteristics of both the communication that occurred and of individual group members; and (2) that differences between the groups' notes focused on members' descriptions of characteristics specific to their respective groups and were consistent within groups. Each group of observers reported a similar perception of what occurred during the stimulus event. In order to examine the effects of singular, as opposed to multiple observers on such reports, the second study was conducted.

Study Two

Procedure

Interview data. Similarities and differences in individuals', as compared to groups', observations of a single event were examined via intensive interview data. The subjects interviewed were seven female and two male graduate students that comprised one of the four groups examined in Study One. All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed for purposes of analysis. The interview schedule was designed specifically to

generate data concerning individual similarities and/or differences in five areas related to the collection and analysis of qualitative data. These areas include: (1) the categorization of events, (2) the identification of foreground and background information, (3) the ability to remember information or events, (4) the relation of concepts to observation, and (5) the relation of personal experience to observation.¹ Specific questions used in the interview were as follows:

1. List the subevents that happened in the first exercise.
2. How would you rank order these events in terms of their importance? Why?
3. What concepts were involved in the mini-theory developed from your observations?
4. What questions did you develop?
5. How would you rank order your questions in terms of their importance for validation of your theory? Why?
6. Would you say that there was any particular point in the weekend when everyone relaxed, would you say that it was more of a process, or that people never really did relax? How would you characterize the tension level throughout the weekend?
7. Do you have any other general comments that you would like to make concerning the weekend?

Archival data. In addition to the data generated by these interview questions, two sets of archival data were collected. The first set is a portion of the notes that subjects took during

the first exercise at the qualitative workshop, specifically those concerning the mini-theory and the questions that they generated during the first exercise. The second set is a paper written by the workshop coordinator which outlines the instructional strategies implemented over the course of the weekend (Browning, 1986). This information was used primarily as a method of comparison to determine the accuracy of subjects' accounts of the questions generated and the events that occurred during the first exercise at the workshop.

Analysis of Data

The data analysis was conducted in three steps. First, data were sorted into piles according to the question asked and similarities and differences between subjects' responses to each question were examined. Second, each subjects' interview, as a unit in and of itself, was examined for consistency. Third, and finally, a comparison between interview data and archival data was made in order to determine the extent to which the two were similar.

Results

Categorizing events. When asked to list the events that occurred in the first exercise, the nine subjects generated six different lists, two which were recalled by more than one subject. Two qualities differentiated one list from another: the number of events recalled and the terms used to describe those events. The number of events ranged from two to five, with five being the more specific and inclusive. One of the lists of two events, for example, included making a list of eight values

and having a discussion "about what people valued." The list of five events, on the other hand included a lecture given by the coordinator of the weekend, a listing of "eight to ten values," a discussion of the values, a discussion of the value discussion, and question period, designed to teach participants "how to ask questions better." The labels used to discuss each event also varied. When included in subjects' lists, for instance, the coordinator's presentation was termed as a "talk," as "giving directions," and as a "lecture." Similarly, the leaderless group discussion in the first exercise was described as a "round table discussion" and a "discussion about values" by some, while others elaborated further, noting that "we presented what we had on our lists," "we started talking about what people valued," and "we compared lists."

Foreground/background. The task of rank ordering the events that occurred in the first exercise generated nine distinctive lists of priorities. A great deal of difference here would be expected, due to the differences in the events listed, however, the reasons provided by subjects concerning their rank ordering demonstrate value differences that would likely have generated distinctive lists even had the original list been similar. Two of the nine subjects, for example, placed a great deal of value on the learning process involved in generating their list of "values," whereas others viewed this activity as secondary, if not inconsequential. One subject noted that "He could have asked us to list our favorite vegetables for all that mattered." She clarified, saying that "the list was just to get us uh, talking

about something, not our favorite vegetables, but something uh, slightly personal." Similarly, one subject rank ordered receiving instructions second, because "it wouldn't have been possible to even start thinking along the lines of the list required if he hadn't given the directions as he did," whereas another noted that the lecture was "just sort of something we had to do to go on to more interesting things."

Due to the differences in subjects' initial lists of questions generated for the interview assignment, their rank orderings were, again, dissimilar. As with the ranking of events, though, reasons given for the ordering of the questions also reflect value variations among the subjects. Several patterns emerged as organizing schemes in determining the importance of questions. First, three of the nine subjects noted that some of their questions "lead into" others. Whereas two of these individuals designated their final questions as the most important, the third stated that her leading questions were more important as they "would be a means of seeing if the [other question] was applicable." Two other subjects noted their most important questions to be those most likely to generate "interesting information" or those that focused on events that "really had an impact on what happened" and one other subject felt that questions he was allowed to "follow up" on were most significant. Of the final three subjects, two rated all of their questions as having equal importance, and one subject could recall only one question.

Effects of memory. Similarities and differences in recall

abilities can be examined both through the number of questions subjects were able to remember and the detail with which they were able to remember them. When the number of questions recalled was compared to the number actually generated, according to the archival data, an average recall rate of 27 percent was calculated. Questions correctly cited during the interviews ranged from 17 percent to 36 percent. Perhaps more telling than the actual number of questions noted, however, is the variability in detail with which subjects discussed their questions. While virtually every subject noted that they had difficulty recalling their questions with remarks such as "I'm not going to remember all of them" and "I can't tell you what the specific questions were," all were able to at least provide a general description of one of their questions. Some, however, were able to provide a verbatim account of a portion of their questions and were able to recall the number of questions that they asked, within one question. For example, one subject noted "I guess my schedule was about seven questions and they were getting at, I remember, and I only, I only got to ask one or two of them." He then went on to recall, word for word, the two questions (of his set of six) that he asked, as indicated both by his retrospective verbal account and by circles drawn around those particular questions in the archival data.

Concepts related to observation. The concepts that subjects generated following an observation period can be categorized into three groups: those focusing on the group, those focusing on individuals, and those focusing on both the group and

individuals. Five of the nine subjects reported themselves to have generated a "mini-theory" involving an aspect of the group process such as "consensus-seeking," group norms (e.g., being "polite," "friendly," and "open"), the tendency to "make sense in an ambiguous situation," and the use of "tools and props" when the group was not "comfortable." Three subjects focused on individual group members in an effort to label roles, such as "provacator," "summarizer," and "leader," and motives for particular actions, such as a preference for being "real precise." Finally, one subject examined both a general phenomenon, self disclosure in the group, and more specific group member roles.

Effects of personal experience on observation. When asked to characterize the tension level throughout the weekend, subjects gave a wide variety of responses, all of which incorporated their own experiences into a general observation. One subject described the group as "normally bland all weekend," noting that she "didn't sense that anyone was really uptight." Although others shared her feelings, two subjects were, indeed, quite "uptight." One, for instance, described herself at a particular point, as "close to the ragged edge of, you know, running from the lodge, tearing my hair as I was going to get." Another noted that she "had a lot of distress." Generally, subjects characterized the tension level as decreasing slowly throughout the weekend, decreasing rapidly at a specific point, rising and falling alternately, or never really changing at all.

General comments given in the final portion of the interview

were similarly variable. Three of the nine described the weekend as evolving from a basically ambiguous, negative experience to a relaxing, positive one. Reasons for the initial negative impressions ranged from hearing "horror stories" to being "mad that I had to sacrifice a whole weekend." Three other subjects focused on the value of the learning component, with comments such as "I learned some things about interviewing," "it was a valuable experience in a lot of ways," and "I've made some connections with what I've learned." These individuals characterized their emotions toward the event as rather ambiguous, noting that "it was pretty hard to explain" or commenting on alternate feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with their performance. One individual described the entire experience as "nice," "great," and "enjoyable," and the remaining two declined the opportunity to make additional comments.

Discussion

Farrell (1976) notes that "the criteria of proof in science are public, and not private; that the allegiance of the scientist is towards the creation of a consensus" (p. 3). Brockreide's (1982, 1983) works on perspectivism, on the other hand, stress the importance of the differential emphases that individuals place on any aspect of a particular relationship. The results of this investigation indicate not only that both consensual and intersubjective results can be produced from a single stimulus event, but that changes in methodological procedures can produce this difference in "perspective."

In Study One, multiple observers were exposed to a single event and their accounts of the event were recorded in the form of hand written field notes, immediately following the exposure. Although substantially different between groups, the accounts produced by individuals within any one group were in agreement with one another. Group members agreed, for instance, that their group was characterized by an initial tension and a subsequent move toward cohesiveness or that their group had a norm of politeness and display of intellectual competence. In other words, a consensus of the observers' accounts was obtained for each group.

In Study Two, intensive interviews with the individuals from one of these four groups were conducted within two weeks following the event. Subjects were each asked seven questions designed to elicit their accounts of the same event. Results from this study included not only more detail concerning personal experiences, but also showed signs of disagreement and significant memory loss concerning the data. Whereas one individual described herself as having "a lot of distress," for example, another stated that "there wasn't very much" tension in the group and that she, herself, "didn't feel a lot of pressure" and "enjoyed just being away." Ability to recall questions generated during the event ranged from 17 to 36 percent. Implementing the more detailed, probing questions that comprised the interview schedule, in addition to delaying the recording of data, therefore, produced more intersubjective accounts of what occurred during the stimulus event.

While both of these accounts have a great deal to offer a qualitative researcher who is trying to recreate the happenings of the event being described, neither, in and of itself, constitutes a "complete" description. The first, composed of observational field notes written by participants, created consensual validity from the group perspective. Participants in each group, in other words, agreed on what occurred during the stimulus event. While establishing consensual validity, however, the detail of each participant's personal experience was lost. Validity from the intersubjective point of view, therefore, decreased. The second account, on the other hand, composed of intensive interviews with participants, generated intersubjective validity. Participants provided more detailed accounts of their personal experiences. Consensual validity, however, was sacrificed, as agreement between observers and recall abilities decreased. Bennett (1985) notes that "It is important to recognize that the division between science and the senses is not justified in fact, but in the structure of communication about fact" (p. 267). Although Bennett encourages researchers to "make conceptual room" (p. 270) for intersubjectivity in their consensus-based descriptions, this statement points out the fact that at some point in the research process, the researcher must make a decision, whether by conscious choice or by forfeit, concerning the extent to which the investigation will focus on the intersubjective, individual perspective or on an amalgamation of individual viewpoints.

Weick (1985) notes that "to deal methodologically with

validity is to make explicit one's status on those dimensions that are central to the assessment of credibility as defined by different audiences." Williams (1979) defines validity as "the degree to which researchers are measuring what they claim to measure" (p. 20). Specific explanation of the perspective taken by the qualitative researcher, as well as careful attention to the type of generalizations made from results, would therefore fulfill the criteria for validity.

Bowers and Bradac (1982) discuss the importance of numerous rather than singular methods and approaches to research. The results of this study support, if not prescribe, the pluralism proposed by Bowers and Bradac, however they do so with two qualifications: (1) that qualitative researchers maintain an awareness of the opposing demands of establishing validity through consensus and giving justice to the unique perspective of each participant and (2) that researchers make decisions concerning these demands, as well as their rationale for making such decisions, explicit to their readers. While creating consensual validity from a perspective emphasizing generalizability, researchers need to note that intersubjective validity will be greatly diminished. Similarly, when creating intersubjective validity, focusing on individuals' experiences, consensual validity is lost. As noted by Bennett (1985), "It is one thing to generate alternative conceptions of a situation, but it is something else again to demonstrate what it is that recommends an alternative representation as a relevant basis for transforming the situation" (p. 285). Bochner (1985) similarly

stresses the importance of making one's research goals explicit so as to provide critical readers with a basis for evaluation. The presentation of sufficiently detailed accounts of qualitative researchers' methodological choices, in addition to a rationale for how they came to make those choices, would allow their work to be judged not solely on the degree to which results reported are intuitively pleasing, but more importantly, on the degree to which the method employed is an appropriate one to respond to the research question at hand.

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Footnotes

¹As stated by Brockreide (1982) in reference to his choice of dimensions of human understanding, the selection of the five previously mentioned areas and the seven interview questions was not "idiosyncratic." The first question, asking the subjects to list the subevents in the first exercise, was designed in an effort to determine similarities and/or differences in how subjects categorized subevents within the context of a larger occurrence. In discussing stories in criminal trials, Bennett (1978) notes that "categorization can become the key link in establishing a chain of connections to the central action in a story" (p. 13). Weick (1985) similarly states that "The act of connecting particulars to concepts is literally an act of rewording the particular" (p. 579). The manner in which subjects categorize subevents, therefore, is of particular relevance to the nature of results generated through observational research methods.

The second and fifth questions, which require subjects to perform a rank ordering task, address the issue of foreground and background information. Brockriede (1982, 1985) and Brummett (1976) both discuss the metaphor of the figure and the ground in reference to the different elements or dimensions of "reality"

that persons accentuate. Brockriede (1982) states their basic premise that while "one dimension is the featured figure; the others serve as the ground" (p. 146). The significance of recognizing possible differences in observers' formulations of foreground and background information is summarized in Brunnett's notation that "More important than the experimental focus which produces data is the organizing and guiding perspective which interprets that data" (p. 43).

The development of concepts from foreground and background information is addressed by the third question. Weick (1985) discusses concept development by noting the large degree to which the nature of observers' interests and belief systems can effect the types of concepts that emerge from their observations. He cautions his readers against "solipsism," which, he stresses, can result in a selective, and therefore limited view of "reality." As noted by Brockriede (1985), however, an observer can emphasize a particular dimension without categorizing others as irrelevant. This third question was designed in order to examine similarities and/or differences that individuals demonstrate in their development of concepts from the observation of a single event.

The fourth item focuses on possible limitations of subjects' ability to recall a set of questions that they, themselves generated for an interview assignment during the workshop. Such limitations of human memory have been noted by researchers such as Kihlstrom (1981), Messe, Buldain, & Watts, (1982), and Stafford and Daly (1984). Indeed, those providing instructions to beginning qualitative researchers encourage their readers to

record data as soon as possible after, if not during observations, as memory limitations can effect both the quality and quantity of data collected (e.g., Lofland & Lofland, 1984). Recognizing possible limitations, similarities and/or differences in individuals' recall abilities following exposure to a single event may have implications for issues of validity and reliability in observational research.

Both the sixth and the seventh questions which require subjects to describe the tension level of the group and add any general comments they may have about the weekend, respectively, evoke subjects' use of personal experience in the observation and interpretation of an event. Weick (1985) emphasizes the importance of being aware of the degree to which one's own experience enters into the process of observation, advising his readers to become observers of themselves. Brockriede (1985) similarly discusses the role of experience in the formulation and interpretation of constructs, noting that "Experience is the lifeblood of constructs: the source of many and the illustration of all." Given the apparent centrality of the role played by experience in the interpretation of data, further specification of similarities and/or differences in individuals' use of experience is relevant to issues such as reliability and generalizability in qualitative research.

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